CRITICS CHOICE™

FOCUS ON

SWAMP THING

FINALE

BY JAMES VAN HISE

CRITICS CHOICE FILES MAGAZINE SPOTLIGHT

Swamp Thing

EDITED BY HAL SCHUSTER

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BY JAMES VAN HISE

FINALE

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SWAMP THING!

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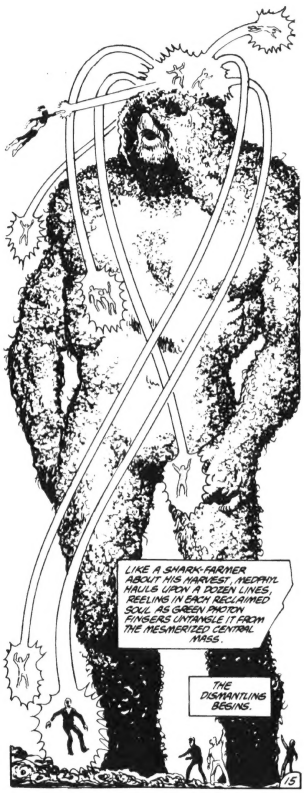
Introduction

What can you do with a Swamp Thing? That's what most fans must have decided as Saga of the Swamp Thing creaked its way up towards issue twenty with stories following the basic format of the Swamp man encounters a weird menace, fights it and movies on while a secret government agency pursues him. Not a lot of room for development there.

Then Alan Moore, a name new to American comic readers, appeared in issue #20 where he tied up loose ends and sharpened his skills for what would prove a long-term stay by comic book standards. A writer or artist who sticks with over forty issues of any comic book is considered a modern wonder and certainal an exceptional case. But what marked Alan Moore's tenure on Swamp Thing was not so much its duration as what he did there. He came up with new ideas. He took supporting characters and fleshed them out into human beings. He wrote stories which were actually fresh and tended to surprise even those of us who have been reading these


LIKE A SHARK-FARMER ABOUT HIS HARVEST, NEDPATH HAULS UPON A DOZEN LINES, REELING IN EACH RECLAIMED SOUL AS GREEN PHOTON FINGERS UNTANGLE IT FROM THE MESMERIZED CENTRAL MASS.
THE DISMANTLING BEGINS.

Swamp Thing became the ongoing forum in which Alan Moore established himself as one of the most important writers working in comics today. He succeeded in breaking the superstar barrier in comics in that he became "hot" without also being an artist, like Frank Miller. In a medium which is as visually oriented as comics, the writer not only seemed to be of secondary importance to too many fans, he was treated like he was of secondary importance. Fans more often discuss favorite artists than favorite stories. But suddenly Alan Moore was producing adventures which were very different and which drew you to his work. While working on Swamp Thing he concocted The Watchmen, wrote new Miracleman stories as well as some of the best Superman stories ever done ("For The Man Who Has Everything . . ." in Superman Annual #11 is a prime example).

Moore has taught us to expect more from the stories we read and even though he has left Swamp Thing behind him now, his issues are a testament to what the me-

things for 25 years and more and who thought we'd seen it all. While I enjoyed issues 20-31, it was issue 32 that made me sit up and take notice. "Pog" remains an amazing little story to this day, like nothing else I'd ever read. One can feel the burst of information reading this story and see that important transformations were underway. The second annual has similar reverberations. Alan Moore, while telling is that Swampy wasn't really Alec Holland after all, nonetheless proved that he was still a person with a soul. In Alan Moore's Swamp Thing, we see Swampy kiss Abby and make love, and it's not done for shock effect.

Moore's Swamp Thing also took us inside a home for emotionally disturbed children as well as to both heaven and hell (although God, or whoever's in charge, was nary to be seen). And just when we thought that he had written himself into a corner with Swamp Thing's death he uses it to present the most imaginative stories in the series.

dium can achieve. By writing such relentlessly imaginative tales, he inspired artists like Steve Bissette, John Totleben, Rick Veitch and Alfredo Alcala to do work of such a high calibre that their own stars have been polished. Bad stories bore good artists and the evidence is always telling. But when an artist has a gem, it excites and invigorates him, reminding him just what it was that attracted him to the medium to begin with. When an artist is given material to work with that he can respect, and which he feels respects his own capabilities, everyone profits from the result. This is evident even when a fill-in artist worked on Swamp Thing, such as Shawn McManus, a fine artist whose work is not seen often enough.

And so while this volume may close the book on Alan Moore's chronicles of the Swamp Thing, it doesn't close the book on what he accomplished on the series.

"Is it any wonder that the immoral art forms and stagnant philosophies of today's bewildered humanity abound with the same hollow lament: 'DEAR GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN US?'"
EXCERPTED FROM: "POW! PSYCHOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING THE SUPER-MEN (AND WOMEN)"
BY Dr. Robert Huntoon
Galaxy Publishing
A Black Cat Edition 1986
OH, LOOK-- THE HUMANS-- THEY'RE HAVING A COOKOUT.
BUT WHUWHUWHY WASN'T WOODRUE INVITED?
SWAMP THING
LEN AND BERNI WERE HERE 1972
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Issues
Jeff Orlando

SWAMP THING #51 — "Home Free"

Writer: Alan Moore
Artists: Rick Veitch and Alfredo Alcala
Editor: Karen Berger
Colorist: Tatjana Wood

Swamp Thing has successfully completed his war in the netherworld, accompanied by Deadman and Phantom Stranger. The trio bid each other farewell to return to their previous realms of existence.

On the Earth realm, Abby is in jail, having been arrested after photos were published of her in a romantic liason with a monster, namely Swamp Thing. The Public Defender tries to get Abby to claim that the thing attacked her. Abby is shocked at this and tries to explain that it was the opposite. When she asks exactly what it is she's being charged with, the unsympathetic defender replies, "Crimes against nature." Abby bursts out laughing.

At the hearing, bail is set at fifteen thousand dollars by a judge who is particularly appalled at Abby's crime, considering that she works with children.

That night Abby is surprised to find that someone has put up the bail for her--it's Deanna, her employer, or should we say former employer. The woman feels that she owes Abby this because of what a good teacher she's been. But she makes it clear that she doesn't think she owes Abby anything more and considers their friendship and working relationship terminated. For the first time, Abby feels as though she is guilty of something horrible.

Abby returns home only to find that her friends shun her and she's the recipient of obscene phone calls and hate mail. The press begins to hound her. This is, after all, a scandal of an unusual sort.

AND ALL THE DOGS OF HOUMA STARTED TO BARK
...AND THE TREES SHIVERED IN A PANIC OF DEAD LEAVES...
...AND THE MOON DREW THICK GRAY COVERS OVER ITS HEAD...

Swamp Thing returns to Earth and encounters Constantine, who shows him how to baffle a vegetable by seemingly vanishing into thin air.

Abby has no idea where Alec is and finally decides she can't live like this any more and so jumps bail, fleeing to Gotham City where she is accidentally picked up in a sweep of prostitutes. The police soon discover who she is and the news makes headlines.

Swamp Thing returns to Abby's house and finds it deserted. The canendar tells him that he's been gone for months, even though to him it seemed like only a few days.

In the swamp, as he's search for Abby, he finds a newspaper which tells him everything. The fury of Swamp Thing knows no bounds.

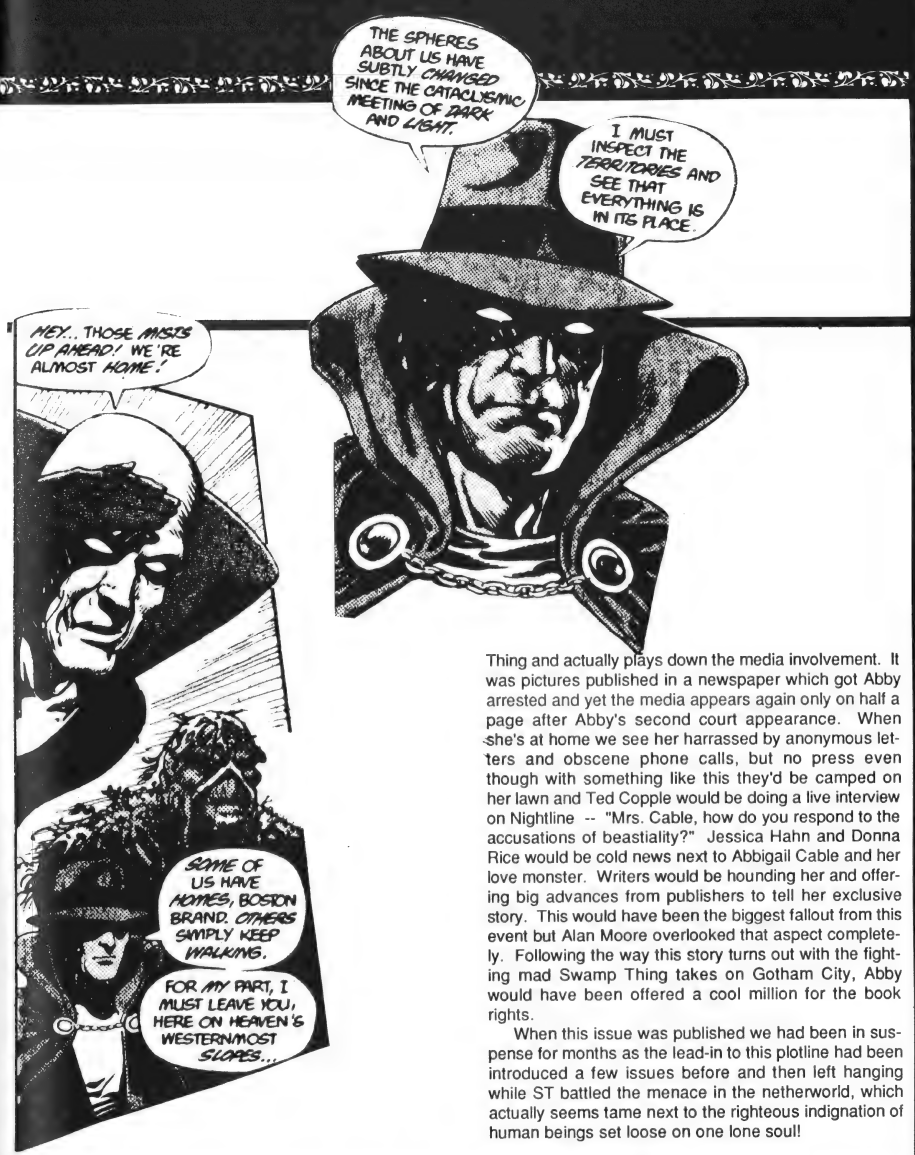
* * * * *

The world as the Swamp Thing knows it and reality as experienced by Abby Cable are contrasted time and again in this story. ST often shambles through a realm which is ethereal and beautiful in the extreme, as evidenced on page 2. Even though this is a borderland of the netherworld it is colored in yellow and orange, indicating warmth and peace. The opposite page shows Abby in a jail cell near a shop-lifter. Abby still cannot face the seriousness of her situation. It all seems too impossible and unreal. When the other woman asks what she's in for, Abby replies, "Hugging vegetables."

Even though Abby is the one accused of a sleazy sex crime, the authority figures she encounters are rendered in unpleasant and repulsive closeups as though in some sort of role reversal. Note the Public Defender in panel 5 on page 4 (you'll have to count, DC is playing some sort of game and not numbering pages, just like Marvel did a few years back) and the judge on the bottom of page 6 who looks normal until we see him up close. Are the artists and writer implying that everyone seems normal until you scrutinize them too closely?

The scene of greatest emotional impact is when Abby faces Deanna, her boss and friend. Even she has judged Abby guilty as charged but has had the decency to see that it isn't all black and white and that Abby is nonetheless a woman who is brilliant with children and who deserves one favor, her bail. But the school's reputation has nonetheless been damaged by Abby's connection to it and Deanna blames Abby for that, and cuts her loose with a few simple words. Only then does Abby fully realize the depth of castigation she's facing. She's losing her friends, her job and everything she cares about. She loves the children she worked with, and now she's being forever barred from them. Even at her hearing the judge found it repulsive that Abby has worked with children only to be guilty of an apparent sex crime.

As volatile as the subject of this story is, Moore deals with society's response to Abby's relationship to Swamp


THE SPHERES ABOUT US HAVE SUBTLY CHANGED SINCE THE CATACLYSMIC MEETING OF DARK AND LIGHT.
I MUST INSPECT THE TERRITORIES AND SEE THAT EVERYTHING IS IN ITS PLACE.
HEY... THOSE MISTS UP AHEAD! WE'RE ALMOST HOME!
SOME OF US HAVE HOMES, BOSTON BRAND. OTHERS SIMPLY KEEP WALKING.
FOR MY PART, I MUST LEAVE YOU, HERE ON HEAVEN'S WESTERNMOST SLOPES...

Thing and actually plays down the media involvement. It was pictures published in a newspaper which got Abby arrested and yet the media appears again only on half a page after Abby's second court appearance. When she's at home we see her harrassed by anonymous letters and obscene phone calls, but no press even though with something like this they'd be camped on her lawn and Ted Copple would be doing a live interview on Nightline -- "Mrs. Cable, how do you respond to the accusations of beastiality?" Jessica Hahn and Donna Rice would be cold news next to Abbigail Cable and her love monster. Writers would be hounding her and offering big advances from publishers to tell her exclusive story. This would have been the biggest fallout from this event but Alan Moore overlooked that aspect completely. Following the way this story turns out with the fighting mad Swamp Thing takes on Gotham City, Abby would have been offered a cool million for the book rights.

When this issue was published we had been in suspense for months as the lead-in to this plotline had been introduced a few issues before and then left hanging while ST battled the menace in the netherworld, which actually seems tame next to the righteous indignation of human beings set loose on one lone soul!

SWAMP THING #52 — "Natural Consequences"

Writer: Alan Moore
Artists: Rick Veitch and Alfredo Alcala
Editor: Karen Berger
Colorist: Tatjana Wood

The Swamp Thing has discovered that Abby is being held prisoner by the authorities in Gotham City and his intelligence roars through the ground on his way to that destination, causing plants to spring up in his wake.

Upon reaching Gotham he senses another mind in the green world he occupies and he goes to investigate.

Meanwhile Dwight Wicker of the D.D.I. arrives at police headquarters wanting to see Abby as she is a lead to the creature they have been searching for.

Swamp Thing detects the mind in the Arkham Asylum For The Criminally Insane. It is Woodrue, a self-made plantman who once tried to use his control of nature against humanity. He is quite insane now and when Swampy leaves, Woodrue begs him not to leave him there with the "voices."

Abby is being led into the courthouse for her extradition hearing. She is beseiged by the press and by whacko onlookers. She carries a single rose and through it Alec contacts her. He is on his way, and he is very angry.

Dropping the rose, it becomes Alec's gateway into the courtroom and through it he instantly creates a new

body. Although The Swamp Thing makes it clear that his power is greater than anyone else's there, Abby fears that if the police open fire that innocent people will be hurt. Swampy agrees to leave but demands that Abby be released in one hour.

Then Swampy begind to whirl through Gotham, causing the city to become overwhelmed by a huge forest, a new Eden in which its people can return back to nature.

But the city is not asleep. Wicker brings in a consultant, at a cost to the city of one million dollars. It's a man named Lex Luthor. And while the city is being overwhelmed by vegetation, one man looks angrily on. The Batman.

* * * * * * *

The issue leads off with a brilliant Steve Bissette cover of the Swamp Thing's tendrils swarming over the Arkham Asylum. Arkham is a reference to the works of H.P. Lovecraft, one of the premiere horror writers of the 20th century who often wrote stories dealing with mankind facing primal, unhuman forces.

Moore has successfully manipulated us in this storyline to revile humanity and all that it represents as Abby is persecuted for something that was her private business and which she never would have involved anyone else in. But a nosy photographer snapped pictures of her to make a few bucks, not caring who was hurt by their publication. This injustice has been repeated over and over by authorities who had to bend the laws to even find her guilty of something, just because they themselves found it incomprehensible. Abby never lied about what she had done once confronted because she felt no shame. She knew the truth of the purity of nature and her relationship with it, but no one would believe her. And now they are bringing the wrath of nature down on them.

The subplot with Dwight Wicker and the D.D.I. has been dormant for awhile but it makes sense that a high profile incident like this would bring it out again. This dates back to the first stories of Swamp Thing written by Moore when he reevaluated the character and established that ST wasn't really Alec Holland, but was an imitation of him wrought in the swamp, sort of a vegetable clone.

The interlude in the Arkham Asylum is interesting if only for a brief look at some old Batman foes who are housed there, thus serving as foreshadowing that the Dark Knight is a presence felt in Gotham just as Swamp Thing is a presence felt in the green.

Now that Abby is in Gotham, we see a higher profile presence of the press, although it's still not as shrill as it would be in reality.

Swamp Thing's emergence on page 13 is wonderful, as he bursts into thorny life with an expression of malev-

olent triumph on his face. And lest there is any doubt of his involvement with Abby, he refers to her as his wife.

The introduction of Luthor comes as a surprise and was actually more effective at the time of its publication than rereading would indicate. This was before the John Byrne/Marv Wolfman version of Luthor as a brutal industrialist. At the time we saw Luthor in this story, he was well known as an international criminal and a man to be feared on many levels. That the government would seek him out served to indicate the corruption at work here. Now it doesn't carry that taint as the modern Luthor hides his criminal activities behind a veneer of respectability. Luthor had no such veneer at the time this story was published and carried with him decades of well publicized villainy.

The engulfing of Gotham by the green is portrayed not as a catastrophy, but more like an evolution to a higher, more ethereal and desireable plane of existence. We actually come to see that perhaps life in the city would be happier for people if it stayed this way. In that context Batman almost seems like a serpent in the garden when he appears on the last page of the story.

Although Moore was only months away from leaving the title at this time, he was still coming up with storyline for Swamp Thing which were fresh and energetic, and this years after other writers had failed to do anything new and different with what seemed a tired idea. It just goes to show you that even a seemingly uninteresting character can be transformed at the hands of a brilliant writer. This storyline is just one more example of why Moore emerged as the first superstar writer in comics.

THEIR TIME IS UP.
AN HOUR HAS PASSED, AND HE UNDERSTANDS THAT THEY DO NOT INTEND TO SURRENDER HER WITHOUT FURTHER CONFRONTATION.
THEY MUST BE TAUGHT. THE CONFLICT MUST BE ESCALATED.
CONFLICT LEADS TO ANOTHER...
THE CITY IS ALL ABOUT HIM. A DEFIANT SLASH OF STONE AND STEEL AND GLASS THAT FORCES BACK THE SURROUNDING WILDERNESS, CLEARLY ESTABLISHING ITS RIGHT GRAY TERRITORY.

SWAMP THING #53 — "The Garden of Earthly Delights"

Writer: Alan Moore
Artist: John Totleben
Editor: Karen Berger
Colorist: Tatjana Wood

Gotham City is under seige by the Swamp Thing. Commissioner James Gordon summons the Batman and explains how the city has been turned into a savage Eden and that a large segment of the population is actually enjoying it like this.

Among the many fruit-bearing plants growing in abundance there now are also the strange Swamp Thing tubers which produce hallucinations in those who bite into them.

Meanwhile Lex Luthor is giving the city the plans to a weapon to use against Swamp Thing.

Out in the forested Gotham, the Swamp Thing is admiring his handiwork when the Batman drives up in a special all-terrain version of the Batmobile. Batman and Swamp Thing have met before, but Swampy was not so powerful, then. Batman asks Swamp Thing to give the city back. Alec refuses to do so until Abby is returned to him. Batman explains that the city cannot surrender to terrorism and emerges from the Batmobile with a flamethrower. He destroys the Swamp Thing's body but it quickly emerges in another, with a platoon of backups at his side. A squad of Swamp Thing's beats Batman senseless and has him give the authorities a message--that unless his wife is returned things will get much worse.

Swamp Thing also appears to Commissioner Gordon and gives him until dawn to surrender his wife.

Out among the new green, Swampy is welcomed as a hero by the common people.

As dawn breaks, Batman is at City Hall with Commissioner Gordon as a 200 foot tall Swamp Thing comes striding up. He gives them one hour and explains just how bad things can become.

Batman consults with the authorities, asking what crime Abby has really committed? Who has she hurt? And if they are going to punish someone for having a relationship outside their species, they'd better arrest Hawkman, Metamorpho, Starfire, Martian Manhunter and that guy who lives in Metropolis. They get through to

Washington and have the arrest order invalidated so that Abby can be released.

The message is delivered to Swampy by Batman, who also vows to kill the creature if he ever does this to his city again.

Abby is released and as Swamp Thing embraces her in front of City Hall he is shot by something, realizing that suddenly he can't change bodies. He pushes Abby aside, knowing that she's in danger. Then Swampy is hit with napalm and his body destroyed. Electronic devices indicate that there is no bio-electric activity within a thousand miles. Swamp Thing has apparently been destroyed.

* * * * * * *

Never before has a city been held hostage, and the hostages had such a good time. Over and over we see the common folk reveling in their Eden while the authorities become furious and frustrated because they've lost control. It's not just that they're not running things now, but that the people they serve don't seem to mind. Commissioner Gordon speaks of the dire things happening in the city, such as people barricaded inside with guns--against what? As Swamp Thing later observes, violence in the city has been brought to a standstill. The only deaths are from natural causes.

Although it doesn't come out in the dialogue, of course the people would be happy with this. Everything has been brought to a standstill. The people have no jobs to go to, they can just romp and play in the great forest. Plus the forest provides them with ample food so they won't go hungry. The one point Moore overlooks in an otherwise complex narrative is that the homeless of Gotham would not go hungry so long as the city is in the grip of the verdant, fruitful plantlife.

The Batman in this story is the Frank Miller Batman as established in Dark Knight, which was still being published at the time this story appeared. This is a more savage Batman, with a Batmobile capable of coming out ahead in any sort of conventional war. One has to wonder, though, if it is well enough equipped to travel through the choking forest beseiging Gotham, how come it doesn't have a built-in flame-thrower? The Batman carries a flame-thrower himself and has to emerge from the armored safety of the Batmobile to use it. It would have been just as interesting if the Swamp Thing beat up the Batmobile, instead of just Batman.

Each time the Swamp Thing appears to the city fathers it is in an ever more dramatic form, demonstrating his incredible power. But as threatening as he appears to them, he is shown to bear no threat at all to the common folk. But weren't some of them hurling catcalls and epithets at Abby when she was brought to the courthouse? Their embracing of the Swamp Thing seems a little too pat. No one questions his romantic involvement with a human woman. As demonstrated in the previous two chapters, no one was on Abby's side. Have some of them changed, and if so, why? Is it because they see that Swampy isn't really a monster, even though he may look like one? None of this is addressed directly.

When Swampy emerged before the authorities last issue, it was dramatically in the courtroom. This time he takes an even more dramatic form which stands as tall as the court house. Page 24 is truly a Swamp Thing classic.

Also classic is when Batman points out that Superman is not of this Earth, and therefore not technically human. Who's going to arrest Superman and charge him with crimes against nature? Funny that Batman should suddenly take Swamp Thing's side after trying to kill him. Perhaps he reconsidered after getting beaten up by a vegetable?

While Luthor's weapon succeeds in preventing Swamp Thing from shifting to another body, it also seems to indicate that perhaps Swampy can't really be killed as we know it for as we'll learn, not next issue, but soon, Swampy has suddenly gone out of this world!

SWAMP THING #54 — "The Flowers Of Romance"

Writer: Alan Moore
Artists: Rick Veitch and Alfredo Alcala
Editor: Karen Berger
Colorist: Tatjana Wood

SOPHISTICATED SUSPENSE
SWAMP THING
WINNER OF FOUR 1985 EAGLE AWARDS!
SPACE CLUSTERS is coming!
by ALAN MOORE, RICK VEITCH & ALFREDO ALCALA

Liz Tremayne, former journalist, sits huddled in her house, terrified and alone. For the past three years she, and her boyfriend, Dennis Barclay, have been hiding from a man who is dead. His paranoia has infected her so that she lives in fear not only of a man who was killed but of everything around her, including electricity. But after Dennis is away from the house for three days, Liz gets desperate and uses oven mits to hold the cord so that she can plug in the television. What she sees is a news report about Abby and the Swamp Thing. Dennis had told her that Abby was dead. The news said that Abby was returning to her home in Houma, Louisiana. Liz pulls out a map and finds the town. Then she goes into the bedroom where Dennis left a wallet full of money and takes the money. Then she dresses and goes outside for the first time in three years.

Abby is home, sitting at the edge of the swamp, thinking about Alec and about what happened. She remembers the friendly support of Commissioner Gordon and of The Batman, and of how Chester Williams gave her the phone number of his environmental group in Baton Rouge.

Walking back to the house she starts cleaning up, but when she has to throw away a dead plant, she breaks down and cries.

Meanwhile Liz has taken a bus to Houma and a cab to Abby's house. When Abby answers the door she barely recognizes the woman. She'd believed that Liz was killed at the same time that Liz thought Abby was. When Abby states that General Sunderland died two years ago, Liz exclaims that this is impossible as Dennis still gets threatening letters from the General almost every week. Liz is so far gone that she can't figure out that if the General were alive and knew where to send threatening letters, that he would have come and gotten Liz and Dennis a long time ago.

Meanwhile, Dennis arrives home and finds Liz missing. He sees the TV is plugged in and finds the map with Houma marked on it. Then he pulls a newspaper

from his pocket with the story of Abby on the front page. He goes to a closet and pulls out an Uzi submachine gun, then gets in his car and drives to Houma. Finding Abby's house isn't difficult.

When the doorbell rings and Abby answers it, Dennis is standing there with his gun aimed at her. When he pulls the trigger Abby had just ducked out of the way. He enters the house and finds Liz. Abby listens as Dennis rambles on, stating that this isn't really Abby but is one of Sunderland's agents. Abby can see that Dennis is crazy and smashes a vase over his head, but as she and Liz run out the back door, Abby forgets until it's too late to get Dennis's gun.

Dennis recovers quickly and follows them into the swamp. Abby drags Liz after her to a special place and forces her to go around a flower filled glade. They stop to rest on the other side. When Dennis tries to cross the glade directly he falls in the water, becoming furious that his gun is wet. As he wades towards Liz and Abby, Abby tells Dennis that he should look behind him. He laughs. What an old trick. Just then an alligator attacks, and another and another, and Dennis is slain by them.

Abby leads Liz back to the house and then calls Chester Williams. She wants to join his environmental group. She also calls Commissioner Gordon to tell him that she will attend the memorial for the Swamp Thing after all.

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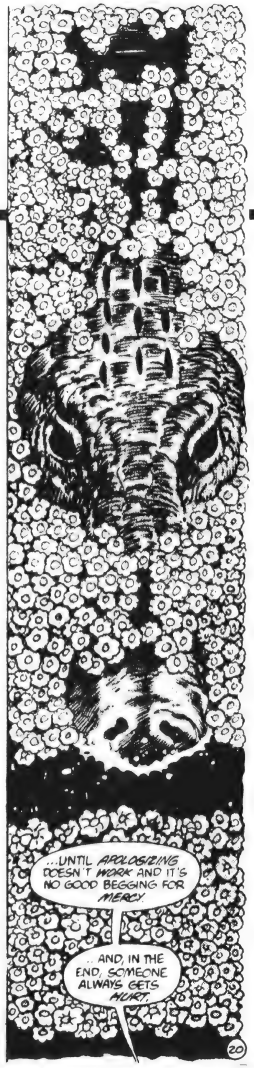


PFFUHH!
OH BOY. OH BOY, ARE YOU IN FOR IT. MADE ME DRENCH MY GUN.
YOU THINK THAT'LL STOP ME?
HUH? YOU THINK THAT'S EVEN GONNA SLOW ME DOWN?

The events of the preceding issue had succeeding in doing what the bizarre criminal accusations against her had not--they'd broken her spirit. Upon returning home, just the simple action of throwing away a dead plant reminds her of Swampy and she breaks down into sobs. Her life is over. She has nothing to live for. And then she meets someone who is infinitely worse off than she.

Liz Tremayne had written a book about the Swamp Thing, but her involvement with ST had brought her into contact with General Sunderland and the D[illegible]. Liz and Dennis Barclay had escaped, the the experience had infested them with the growing seeds of paranoia. Their whole lives were built around hiding out from Sunderland. Dennis didn't believe it when he heard that the General was dead. He had already begun imagining too much about his pursuers to be "fooled" by something like that. In the end he's undone because he thinks he's too smart to be fooled by a trick.

The portrayal of Liz Tremayne as a woman who has been browbeaten and defeated by fear is a realistic and convincing one. Moore never makes any statements about Liz's state of mind other than to describe it exactly as she is feling it. The description of her putting on the rubber gloves and oven mit to pick up an unplugged electrical cord, her sitting in fear for forty minutes before she can even bring herself to touch the cord, and then taking fifteen minutes to work up the courage to plug it in. How this woman must have been emotionally brutalized by Dennis as he warped her fear of Sunderland into a fear of everything outside of their claustrophobic little home. Imagine the courage this woman had to work up to get dressed and go to look for Abby after seeing her on the news. This is a vivid portrayal of a human being such as we rarely see in comics where characters are all too often inter changeable. We can identify with Liz, as crazed as she is, because she is experiencing human emotions, no matter how extreme. This vivid personal portrayal draws us into the story, creating an ambience of tension and fear. We are made to feel what Liz feels. The unseen "Dennis" becomes a presence felt in Liz's thoughts. We know what Liz cannot bring herself to realize--that Dennis is mad, and probably homicidal.

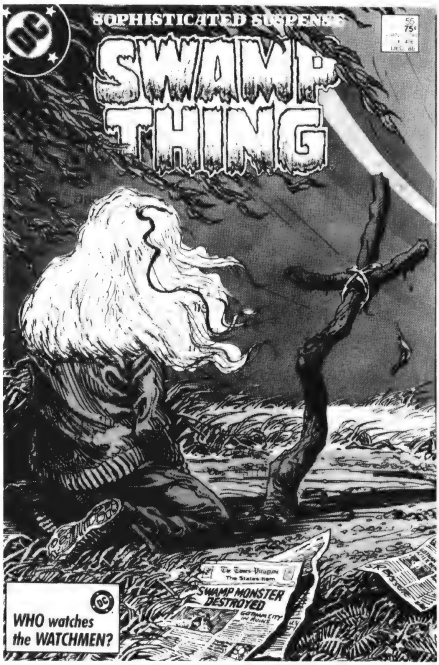
This story might also be called "Passing Through The Flame," as this is what Abby does. It follows that old adage that that which does not kill you, makes you stronger. After facing death from Dennis and seeing him eaten alive by alligators, all other concerns cannot help but be flushed clean. Alec may be dead, but Abby is not. She has faced death on this day and emerged due to her own wit and judgment. One can excuse her momentary lapse in judgment (which even she realizes too late) in forgetting to get Dennis's gun because Abby has been through a wrenching ordeal lasting weeks. The last thing she is prepared to face is a crazed gunman. It takes all of her will just to respond to that situation and she is still pulling herself together as it has only been seconds since Dennis appeared at the front door and tried to shoot her. That she even has the presence of mind to sneak up on him and smash him over the head with a vase says much for her.

That Dennis recovers realistically from being hit over the head probably confuses readers used to seeing people in comics and tv shows easily knocked out for hours in this manner. Actually it's very hard to knock a person unconscious this way as they have to be hit hard enough to knock the brain around inside the skull. They have to be hit so hard, in fact, that you could just as easily kill them as knock them unconscious, otherwise all you do is give them a bad headache and make them very angry.

While comic books had been done before in which supporting characters were used in the absence of the main character, never has it been done this well. At this point we didn't even know whether Swamp Thing was alive. We'd heard that Alan Moore was leaving the book. Could it be that Swampy was dead and this was just Moore's way of ending the series, by tying up the loose ends in Abby's life? There certainly were no overt clues about what happened to Swampy, although looking back we see that the last panel on the last page shows an image of ST against the nighttime sky, outlined against the star field. As we'll soon learn, that's exactly where Swampy is--somewhere in outer space. . .

SWAMP THING #55 — "Earth To Earth"

Writer: Alan Moore
Artists: Rick Veitch, Alfredo Alcala and John Totleben
Editor: Karen Berger
Colorist: Tatjana Wood



In Gotham City a statue is unveiled in the memory of Swamp Thing. Commissioner Gordon expresses regret over what happened as The Swamp Thing had delivered himself to City Hall in good faith at the conclusion of his war with Gotham and upon the release of Abby. The authorities don't know who was responsible for this and the U.S. government has denied any involvement.

Abby notes that even though Alec helped the Justice League once, only Batman is at the funeral. The Dark Knight has vowed to one day bring the Swamp Thing's killers to justice.

During the ceremony Abby thinks back on one time when she came into the swamp and thought she had found Alec only to find that she was embracing one of his crumbling, abandoned bodies. Alec quickly found her and calmed her fears, promising that he would never die.

Unnoticed by Abby at the funeral are the Phantom Stranger and John Constantine, who recently completed adventures with the Swamp Thing.

Abby begins fantasizing over what might have been, how she and Alec could have returned to Houma, Louisiana to be welcomed by a repentant town, but even her fantasy ends in Alec being burned and destroyed.

Boston Brand (aka Deadman) appropriates a person and through him tells Abby that he's explored all the places in the netherworld where the soul of Swamp Thing could be, but he isn't there. So he tells her not to give up hope.

But then Brand abandones the body and the man is arrested for bothering Abby as she didn't understand who the man was.

As the ceremony ends we pull back to a great height first on Earth, and then far away into space to another world where a strange alien blue version of the Swamp Thing stands alone.

* * * * * *

The story opens on Earth seen from space, and then panel by panel moves in closer until the scene concentrates Gotham and the funeral. When the ceremoney ends we withdrawn from it in the same way. A similar motif was used by Moore a couple times in The Watchmen. But just when we think this marks the end of the issue, Moore fools us and reveals the first big clue as to the Swamp Thing's fate. He's in outer space!

When you think about it, he had to have been able to escape his burning body in Gotham because the device which was scrambling his bio-electronic impulses would have also been destroyed by the napalm, thereby freeing him. But since this was a new experience for him, and he was definitely close to death, the Swamp Thing projected his intelligence too far, possibly in a panic as he is still exploring his powers and abilities and is not entirely aware of his limitations, or lack of them.

Commissioner Gordon's eulogy is in keeping with the portrayal of James Gordon as an honorable humanitarian rather than as an ass-covering politician. He apologizes for what happened to ST and discusses how a large percentage of the people of Gotham supported the Swamp Thing in his efforts, and were angered by his betrayal. This speech, Batman's and particularly Abby's quiet thoughts fully capture the sensation of loss one would feel at a funeral. Whereas comic books have general portrayed such events as people standing around crying and vowing revenge, here we examine the more subtle emotions involved and the more profound realizations people experience at such times. We see the rollercoaster ride of emotions that Abby goes through, from joy at the memories of times past to sorrow over what she faces now. This seems real because Moore knows how to write it that way and in so doing sets a very high standard for other writers to follow.

The cover by Steve Bissette shows Abby kneeling in front of a simple, unmarked cross while newspapers lying on the ground tell the story, including that Gotham is in ruins (something not referred to in the body of the story itself). As a joke, a smaller headline states: "Nukeface Sighted in Grimes Household," which is not really legible unless you get very close to it and I doubt that Steve even expected it to be noticed by many people as it's so small.

Although three artists are credited on the story, John Totleben's art seems to be mostly in evidence on pages 6-9, in the touching flashback sequence.

Another powerful issue and a true classic in the literature of comics.

SWAMP THING #56 — "My Blue Heaven"

Writer: Alan Moore
Artists: Rick Veitch and Alfredo Alcala
Colorist: Tatjana Wood
Editor: Karen Berger

Everything is blue. That's what the Swamp Thing sees on this world his electroskeleton has made it to. The weapon which attacked him on Earth made him out of sync with The Green on his home world, so he had to make the big jump to find a new world which would accept his new frequency of existence. He succeeded. This nameless blue world is all his, to play with, to form at his will. He's alive and his power is at its height here. But he is alone. Abby is on another world. How far away? He can't know or say.

He finds himself growing more and more in tune with this world and its beautiful alien life. Swamp Thing experiments with his own body, in flight as well as in creating a duplicate with which to play chess. After the fifth stalemate he knows boredom. Not even his quadrophonic vision can amuse him and he lets his double decay.

But what if? He's afraid to try, but finally gives in to the fantasy and creates a blue, flowery double of Abby and knows joy again. He recreates the town of Houma and populates it with faces from his past. But in a diner he encounters the image of Constantine created from his subconscious. It bedevils him with annoying riddles and angers him.

When it begins to rain his fantasy town begins to sprout flows and become deformed, like the madness which is slowly deforming the Swamp Thing here in his blue heaven. He finally strikes out at the simulcrum he made of Abby, then turning and fleeing from the decapitated blue lover. Finally he faces the horror of his fantasy and kisses the image of Abby goodbye before vaulting his eletroskeleton once more into the void on his search for peace and home.

* * * * *

What can you say about a story whose first page describes death by napalm as "Burning honey. . . trickled over my shoulders. . . down my arms. . . the fire took me in its sticky fist then. . . and death came." This is as close as we get to a flashback, although the inside front cover cleverly contains the Swamp Thing's death certificate issued in Gotham City.

Alan Moore always has extremely well written captions, pulling off descriptions which in the hands of another writer would be ludicrous purple prose, but which more manipulates with the dexterity of concert pianist's fingers dancing across the ivory keyboard. "The turquoise ferns and duck egg pebbles. . . the aquarium light filtering through clouds of bleached cobalt. . . the reflected glint of Prussian midnight from the grazing beetle's polished shell. . . everything. Everything's blue." And that's also just from the first page.

Moore's prose beings to life this story of isolation on a beautiful blue world wherein the Swamp Thing creates images from his past in order to escape madness but instead just plunges deeper into it.

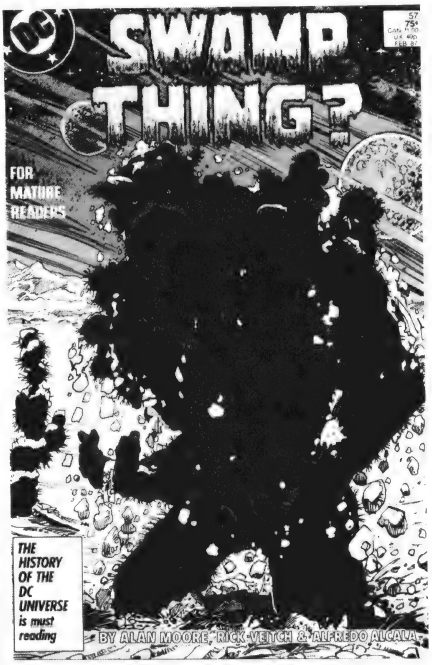
The story begins with Swamp Thing just exploring the gentle beauty of this world and reveling in the simple wonder of being alive, no matter where he is. "The nocturnal butterflies here sing like barely audible birds . . . fluttering around my brow . . . stained glass wings rippling . . . a distant choir . . . soothing . . . distracting."

But in the beauty the madness silently feeds as he thinks, "Mustn't think of Abby . . . mustn't consider the distance between us . . . or I shall scream forever . . . into the silent blue."

Nearly every caption has a description which is either beautiful, touching or just plain amazing to read. Reading through this you can see the writer plunging himself into the narrative with energy and passion. Amazingly this was at a time when Moore knew he was coming to the end of his run on the book and was running out of ideas. This actually becomes apparent with the following issues on Rann but in "My Blue Heaven" Moore reaches his creative peak on the series as he equals the best of everything that's gone before and then goes that extra inch into unrivaled brilliance. While the issues which follow are not really bad, then can only be downhill after this. What can you do for an encore after "My Blue Heaven"?

SWAMP THING #57 — "Mysteries In Space"

Writer: Alan Moore
Artists: Rick Veitch and Alfredo Alcala
Colorist: Adrienne Roy
Editor: Karen Berger


SWAMP THING
57
FOR MATURE READERS
THE HISTORY OF THE DC UNIVERSE is must reading
BY ALAN MOORE, RICK VEITCH & ALFREDO ALCALA

In the Australian outback, archeologist Adam Strange is on his way to the next contact point with the Zeta Beam. As he climbs over a hillock of rocks he comes on the open plain where he'd met the beam three years before only to find that a huge shopping mall has been built there. In a frenzy he rushes inside the "Outback Mall" and starts calculating where the beam will strike. His calculations pinpoint the men's room (it could have been worse) but the spot where it will strike in less than a minute is in an occupied stall. Adam smashes open the door and yanks the man out, but before the gentlemen can pull himself together enough to display his anger, there is a flash of light in the stall and Adam Strange is gone.

As the Zeta Beam teleports him across 25 trillion miles of space, he encounters something. Unknown to him, it is the electroskeleton of the Swamp Thing.

Arriving on the planet Rann, Adam is met, as always, by his lover, Alanna. He is stunned from his trip and is taken back to Sardath's lab. After they leave, the Swamp Thing bends down and picks up Adam's backpack and sees that the label sewn inside is written in English. Could this be an Earth colony, he wonders? He starts following the tracks of the people who just left.

Sardath tells Alanna that Adam is well and she runs into him. A short while later they meet with two representatives of Thanagar who are on Rann for purposes of trading technology. They will help Rann refoliate their deserts and all they want in return are a few bits of information, including the Zeta Beam. This makes Adam suspicious.

Just then a monster is sighted in the city of Ranagar and Adam is summoned to respond. He dons his uniform and flies down, blasting the creature from behind and finally blowing its head off. But the creature isn't dead and merely removes Adam's jet-pack and tries to fly away with it, but Adam blasts it out of the sky. Behind his back, some of the witnesses make jokes at Adam's expense.

That night Adam witnesses Sardath having an argu-

ment with the Thanagarians, but he can't make out what they're saying.

In Ranagar, the Swamp Thing is back in another body and comes upon the statue of Adam Strange, with an inscription written in English, a language he has yet to hear spoken on that planet.

* * * * * *

Upon careful reading, one comes to the conclusion that Alan Moore did a lot of research on Adam Strange and decided to add something never present in the series before — contempt! Adam seems to be held in contempt by the people (or a lot of them) of Rann, even though he has saved their world many times over. Apparently this comes from the fact that Adam has body hair while males on Rann do not. They make ape jokes. This could be passed off as jealousy except for the fact that Adam is portrayed out of character. Gardner Fox created Adam Strange as a man who thinks himself out of situations, not someone who shoots first and asks questions later. That is the biggest flaw in this portrayal. Adam wouldn't just fly down and shoot an alien being in the back without first establishing whether it is indeed a menace. If he did it would be little wonder that he'd be held up to derision. The only "resentment" of Adam ever portrayed by Fox was a time when the people of Rann thought it odd that every time Adam appeared there the planet faced some new menace, as though he were a harbinger of tragedy. This is the only time I have ever seen Moore reinterpret a character to its detriment. It's almost as though he read a bunch of the classic stories and just didn't "get it." But there may be a little more to it than this. The letter column of issue #62 of Swamp Thing has a letter criticizing the characterization of Adam Strange by Moore and in reply the editor explains that Moore incorporated many of the changes to the canon which will be unveiled in the Adam Strange mini-series scheduled for around the Spring of 1988. The editor explains that this will be an Adam Strange with a dark side and that Alan just followed this lead in establishing these concepts early, while also adding a few new touches of his own. But it isn't revealed what Moore borrowed and what he added new. It's also not revealed who the creative team on the new Adam Strange will be although that will probably have been revealed by the time you read this. It remains to be seen whether the new Adam Strange expands on the canon or just trashes it.

On the other hand, one facet of many of the early Adam Strange stories is the unique places where Adam would have to meet the Zeta Beam. Moore recaptures that charm by coming up with the wackiest place of all -- the men's room of a mall which hadn't even been built when Adam last met the Zeta Beam at that point three years before. There's lot's of obvious jokes during this sequence, like references to "Space Cadet" and "out of this world," as well as background gags like a sign on a travel agency which reads: "Get away from it all! Bathe beneath a foreign sun." He also runs by people carrying science fiction toys while he's on his way to a science fiction life.

Adam's arrival on Rann on page 6 is an homage to artists Carmine Infantino and Murphy Anderson (the most popular team on the old series in the Sixties) as the character poses and body language of Adam and Alanna is

SINCE OUR NUCLEAR FOLLY MANY CENTURIES AGO, RANN HAS GROWN INCREASINGLY STERILE. THERE ARE VAST, BLIGHTED AREAS WHERE NOTHING GROWS; STEADILY EXPANDING DESERTS.
IN MANY PLACES, FOOD HAS ENTIRELY DISAPPEARED.
RANN IS STARVING, ADAM.
IZ

instantly identifiable as having the Infantino and Anderson look, from the position of Adam's sprawl on the ground to the way that Alanna is running so thatonly the upper half of her left leg is visible and she is wearing the type of boots which Infantino often drew on characters. Alcala in particular is the perfect inker for this as his smooth style is very much in the Murphy Anderson tradition.

The strangest thing about this issue is that from pages 6-12, only Adam Strange and Swampy speak English until the Thanagarians activate a translator. Until then all of the dialogue spoken by Sardath, Alanna and other residents of Rann is rendered as the alien language spelled out phonetically. This is an interesting idea, but since there is no translation of the language offered anywhere, all the reader can do is look at the pictures and skip those balloons because it's all so much gobbledegook, even though Moore may well have conceived a langauge to use for this and knows exactly what each word means. But we don't and I'm not sure that even a philologist could translate it with what information is at hand.

This story reveals that besides mad scientists and alien invasions, Rann has more commonplace problems, such as starvation, which is exactly the kind of problem that "the thinking man's super hero" could solve, if Adam is given the chance. There is also reference made to increasing sterility among Rann's population due to an ancient atomic war. This reference will prove to be more important next issue.

But the Adam Strange portrayed on pages 16-19 is the most blindly out of character rendition since Denny O'Neil had him spouting such dialogue as, "Nuts! Let's wipe 'em out!" in (Adam) Strange Adventures #222 (Jan. 1970) which even O'Neil now admits was a mistake and out of character. Even good writers sometimes get it wrong.

Still, the issue is fascinating and only when it's over do we realize that this was an Adam Strange story guest-starring Swamp Thing as Swampy only appears on a few pages.

SWAMP THING #58 — "Exiles"

Writer: Alan Moore
Artists: Rick Veitch and Alfredo Alcala
Editor: Karen Berger
Colorist: Tatjana Wood

Adam Strange rises from a fitful sleep, leaving his lover Alanna undisturbed while he walks into the palace gardens. There by the fountain of the water animals he encounters the female Thanagarian, Keela Roo. He asks her again about Thanagar's interest in the Zeta Beam, and she remains as evasive as before, marking it off to simple curiosity. Adam remarks how different she is from his friends Katar and Shayera Hol, the Thanagarians who have been living on Earth for years as Hawkman and Hawkwoman. Keela dismisses them as being good soldiers who are now ideologically unsuited to the new Thanagar. But she respects Adam as he, unlike the Rannians, is a fighter. As she flies off one of the water animals reacts menacingly to Keela Roo's emotional aura.

The next day Adam once more encounters the Swamp Thing, but before he can blast it, it speaks to him. Adam is shocked to hear the thing speaking English and they talk rather than fight. They figure out that Swamp Thing encountered the Zeta Beam and thereby came to Rann with Adam. It comes out that this is the same being Adam Strange had heard had beseiged Gotham City with overgrowths of vegetation. Adam suddenly has an idea and asks Swamp Thing if he might be able to do the same thing for Rann. Swampy has never tried anything on a planetary scale before, nor with such alien growths, but he will try.

They go to the meeting of the Rann council and Swamp Thing's offer is tendered as an alternative to trading the Zeta Beam secret to Thanagar. It is decided to try Swamp Thing's way, much to the anger of the Thanagarians.

That night when Swamp Thing goes into the desert to start search the crust for the green, he is attacked by the two Thanagarians. Adam Strange detects what is happening and flies to Swampy's rescue. He easily defeats one of the Thanagarians but Keela Roo is much more skilled, breaking his arm and two ribs before he is able to lure her after him. He flies back to the palace and over the liquid animals, one of which attacks her and traps her

inside its liquid embrace until the Thanagarian warrior woman drowns.

The next day the Swamp Thing succeeds in contacting and stimulating the dormant green deep beneath the crust, once more bringing growth and life to the deserts.

Adam and Swamp Thing discuss his bio-electrical problem and Strange suggests a certain vegetable civilization on a distant world. Swampy decides to travel there. In exchange Swamp Thing asks Adam to deliver a message to Abby in Louisiana.

Swamp Thing projects himself once more into space just before Alanna runs up to tell Adam the good news — she's pregnant. He kisses her but just then the Zeta Beam wears off and Adam returns to Earth.

* * * *

Alan Moore has come up with a new interpretation of the Zeta Beam. It wasn't a communications beam which went wrong, it was a teleportation beam designed to find a healthy human who could mate with a Rannian and produce offspring for a race which is growing slowly sterile, to reseed the population with a healthy new strain and thereby insure the longevity of the race. But if this were the real reason, there'd be more than one extraterrestrial human running around on Rann as such a thing would be too important to depend on one man. At best it was Sardath who wanted to insure that his own line continued and hoped he could find someone his daughter would love. This is a little less cold and clinical than just looking on Adam as Rann's stud ape. This would also explain some of the derision against Adam by some of the Rannians. They think that Sardath and Alanna are using him for only one reason.

On the other hand, the people of Rann are apparently not as aggressive as humans as Adam remains aa cheaf warrior of Rann. Even Keela Roo admires Adam's ferocity and looks upon the Rannians as weaklings, "insipid Rannians, with milk for blood."

The appearance of the Thanagarians ties in with the Shadow War in the Hawkman series, but it's unlikely that Adam Strange wouldn't be able to figure out that Thanagar is planning to invade Earth. Again, Alan Moore ignores the basic precept of the Adam Strange stories that he was very observant and was able to solve greater dilemmas than this just by assembling disparate clues and divining their true meaning. He's not just an ordinary man thrust into a real life counterpart of John Carter of Mars, which is essentially how Moore views him. While this is certainly the archetype which inspired Gardner Fox when he created the character, he did reinterpret it, just as Moore has reinterpreted that reinterpretation.

The story does have clever touches, such as the liquid animals which seem like just another part of the Rannian landscape, an affectation which Sardath has around and which creates some nice artistic images. Who would

have thought that Adam would have used his peculiar knowledge of their ferocious defense of the Sardath household as a way to save his life? The reference at this point to Terrans being complete bastards when Adam watches Keela Roo drown in the liquid animal's embrace is just extremity in the face of death because Keela Roo was definitely trying to kill Adam and had already broken his arm and two ribs. (Find that in any other Adam Strange story). He was in pain, helpless, with only his wits to fight back with while Keela Roo had proved her treachery. One can't blame him for not trying to save her, although I think that the Gardner Fox Adam Strange would have called off the liquid animal after three minutes rather than letting her go the full seven and drown. This seems more like Moore wanting to prove that Adam could be a complete bastard.

Again, while this is a good Adam Strange story, Moore's reinterpretation of Adam's personality just doesn't always work and flies in the face the previous 25 years of Adam Strange adventures. While continuity of event isn't necessary to strictly maintain, you can't deviate too widely from the character just for the sake of making it more earthy and realistic. Adam Strange was always an idealized character, just as most super heroes are, and while certain shades and subtlties are desirable to be added, it can go too far in the other direction. Perhaps Moore viewed the Gardner Fox characterizations of Adam as a bit bland. A case can be made for that. But portraying Adam as a stupid, brutal, overgrown child living out a science-fiction fantasy is taking him too far in the other direction. A happy medium can be struck. Moore tends to have Adam acting clever and intelligent one minute, and brutal and childish the next. The mix doesn't work. Showing Adam with a smile of delight on his face when he blasted away at Swamp Thing in the previous issue can only be interpreted as a bit bizarre and certainly revisionist.

A gag which turns up a couple times in this issue deals with the fact that Swamp Thing's body is made from a Rannian cactus. Whenever someone shakes hands with him, we see them pulling quills out of their hand afterwards.

Page 7 features an artistic tribute to Murphy Anderson by Veitch and Alcala in panel 2. The position of the body and even the linework in the faces strives to capture that readily identifiable Murphy Anderson look. Anderson is an artist all but forgotten by the new generation of comics fans, but he was one of the bright lights of the Fifties and Sixties and those of us who grew up with comics then will always remember the unique thrills he was capable of providing. In the Seventies he was more often seen inking Superman, but he was still called upon from time to time to recapture a touch of the Adam Strange glory in an occasional story (including a picto-fiction story written by Gardner Fox in Strange Adventures #226, which nevertheless ends with an amusing panel showing Adam and Alanna flying at each other full speed, apparently to embrace, but so close together that one can only imagine them crashing into each other instead).

SWAMP THING
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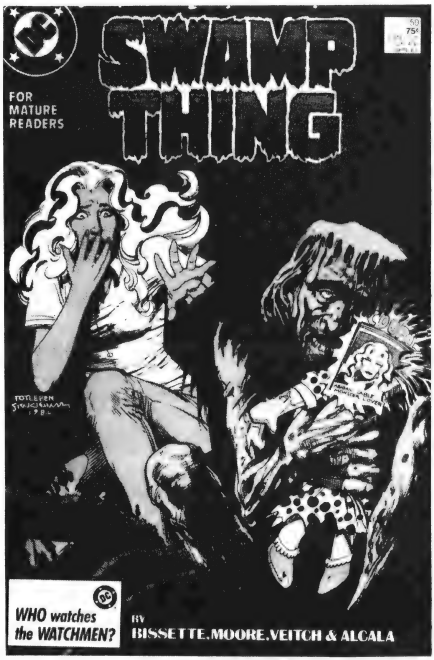
THE HISTORY OF THE

SWAMP THING #59 — "Reunion"

Plot: Stephen R. Bissette, John Totleben, Alan Moore and Rick Veitch
Writer: Stephen R. Bissette
Artists: Rick Veitch and Alfredo Alcala
Colorist: Tatjana Wood
Editor: Karen Berger



In Hell, Arcane suffers the torments of the damned, which includes punishment for what he did to his own brother, Gregori, whom Arcane turned into the Patchwork man.

Arcane's brother is the father of Abby. Her father would read from the book Frankenstein when she was a child. He could never understand why she loved it so much. Now the Patchwork man sits alone in a swamp, clinging to a doll which has a newspaper photo of Abby taped to its face. When two boys come upon the monster and run away, it reminds the Patchwork man of an incident from years before and he begins to relive it, chasing after the boys and trying to call out to them.

Abby awakes from a dream — a dream of the Patchwork man. Then she goes into work at the nursing home where she deals with the old and the infirm. One of her co-workers is a greasy character named Gator who obviously doesn't like his charges. Later that day she comes in and finds Gator robbing the corpse of an old woman who has just died.

Meanwhile, the Patchwork man remembers the day that little Abby wandered into the mine field, and how he went to save her. He was badly hurt. Arcane fixed him up good.

Gator is caught trying to steal from one of the old men and is finally revealed to the manager of the home for the thief that he is.

Abby gets a call from a friend about the reported sighting of a swamp monster in Texas. She drives down there and finds the Patchwork Man, realizing that it's her father right before the wretched creature dies.

In Hell, Arcane laughs because he was able to hurt Abby again, and so the demon games resume with Arcane's head as a football.

* * * * *

This fill-in issue written by Steve Bissette captures the style and the texture of Alan Moore's writing perfectly, but most importantly it captures the sense of content and emotional depth. Bissette's structure is complex and yet not confusing. He blends the flashbacks with images of the Patchwork Man in the present so that he achieves a sense of simultaneous action since these are memories being dwelled on over and over again by the wretched creature. The framing sequence of Arcane suffering his deserved torments adds to the effectiveness of the tale in that it is all related.

The Patchwork Man, including his origin as Abby's father, was introduced in issue 3 of the original Swamp Thing series in 1973. Arcane had been introduced the issue before. Abby was also introduced in issue 3. This was when Bernie Wrightson was the artist and the style and atmosphere of those issues is very much in evidence in the second Swamp Thing series, beginning when Steve Bissette took over as the artist. The second series was originally titled The Saga Of The Swamp Thing but was later just shortened back to Swamp Thing.

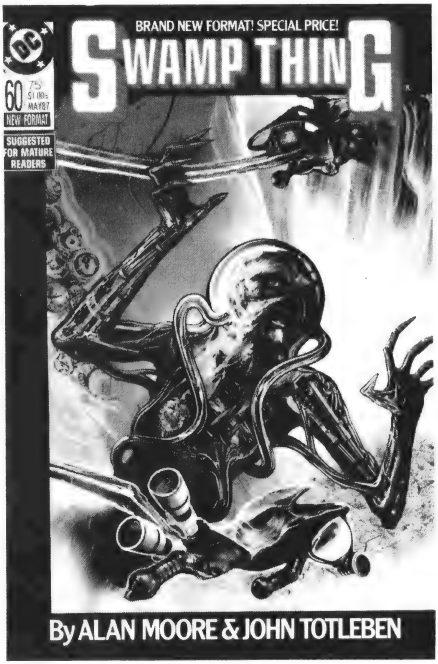
Bissette's portrayal of the old folks home is properly grim and depressing, capturing the different personalities one would find in such an institution both in terms of residents and employees. Even Abby's ambivilence is accurately captured as she's used to working with troubled children, where there remains hope for their recovery. But this is a nursing home for people very near the end of their lives. The manager, Miss Claiborne, accurately points out to Abby that they all need care and acceptance, not just the more likable ones.

The scenes in the nursing home, how ever grim, yet form a counterpoint to the greater wretchedness of the Patchwork Man, who is also near the end of his life and his finding that his body is beginning to fail him. The scene when his eye falls out is particularly disgusting, but it just forms an exaggerated parallel to what other old folks suffer when their bodies begin to fail them.

This is an extremely well-written tale but I expect that Bissette found it quite difficult (in spite of his success) to write in the Alan Moore tradition and was not prepared to attempt it regularly. It would certainly be interesting to see more stories from him, though.

SWAMP THING #60 — "loving the Alien"

Writer: Alan Moore
Artist: John Totleben
Colorist: Tatjana Wood
Type: Richard Bruning
Editor: Karen Berger



Among the stars is a planet where life is based on metal and mechanics the way that the Swamp Thing's life flowers out of the green. It is a lonely world and one day it senses the approach of a life form that it has something in common with. When it is within reach is graps the Swamp Thing's electroskeleton, which to this world is like a ghost form. The planet captures and mates with the electonic patterns on Swampy's cells, finally releasing him to journey again through space, but now this world has created new life. The Swamp Thing has become a father.

* * * * * *

The above is a basic plot outline because it would be difficult to describe what happens inside that planet as much of it is metaphorical and couched in descriptions which capture the alienness of the actions.

For instance: "I drank the wine of his intelligence, drank his body; the pattern of his cells. I ate his fear, I ate his agony, I ate his love, his love, his love. . . The rest I threw away."

The description of alien sex is particularly unnerving on page 15: "After a few moments the screams became low moans and he grew limp upon the torture-harp of wire that held him, hanging in submission, his struggles becoming gradually less frequent as concealed speakers whispered their anesthetic love songs. The principal engine moved upon slick bearings into an appropriate position, and as the first stroke of the cylinder heads drove home he threw back his glass-bubble head, and was never more lovely than at that moment."

John Totleben put a lot of effort into creating the weird montages which Moore then put words to, but in spite of all of his efforts, I don't think the artwork works because it has no meaning. Looking at it, they're just a maze of images which communicate nothing without Moore's words whereas Moore's words stand by themselves without the art. Reading it even one reads Moore's words and there is just no connection between them and the images. The words stand alone, the images to not. There is no fusion between the two even though fusion is what the story is about. This is a bold experiment, but it seems more experiment for experiment's sake than to truly accomplish something and deliver a visual impact.

Essentially what this issue shows is that Moore's skills with prose are more wide and deep than anyone else working in comics today.

HEY... THOSE MISTS UP AHEAD! WE'RE ALMOST HOME!
SOME OF US HAVE HOMES, BOSTON BRAND. OTHERS SIMPLY KEEP WALKING.
FOR MY PART, I MUST LEAVE YOU, HERE ON HEAVEN'S WESTERNMOST SLOPES...

SWAMP THING #61 — "All Flesh Is Grass"

Writer: Alan Moore (from an idea by Stephen Bissette)
Artists: Rick Veitch and Alfredo Alcala
Colorist: Tatjana Wood
Editor: Karen Berger

Adam Strange had told the Swamp Thing that he understood the planet J586 could help him get his bio-matrix in tune with Earth once more. And so Swampy is on his way to the planet in question. He knows that it's a world where plants are the dominate lifeform, but what he couldn't possibly know is that all plant life there is sentient.

When he reaches the planet he attempts to inhabit some plant life in order to create a body. Too late he realizes that he is fusing hundreds of living, thinking beings into one. The result is a monstrosity with skin that cries out and ripples with tortured life.

Medphyl, the Green Lantern of that world, is on hand but is at first uncertain what to do. The Guardians of the Universe have disbanded and Medphyl's own teacher has just died, leaving him feeling alone and without guidance. He examines different courses of action he could take, but each would result in people being slain. Finally he remembers the words of his dead teacher, about engaging his opponent's mind, and uses his ring to dazzle and momentarily hypnotize Swampy. Then he slowly and methodically untangles the huge body and removes all of the plant people from it.

What remains is Swamp Thing's bio-electric skeleton, which Medphyl takes back to his quarters. There he converses with Swampy and learns of his plight and how the accident occurred in which his people were almost killed in large numbers.

Medphyl explains that they do have disciplines to modify the vibrational rate of the bio-field, but learning them will take time. Swamp Thing is anxious. But he needs a body. Nearby is the body of Medphyl's recently deceased mentor, Jothra. He offers Swamp Thing its use, but he has an ulterior motive. Medphyl wants to be able to walk once more with his teacher, to talk with him, and finally accept his passing. When Swamp Thing has learned the disciplines and is ready to leave, Medphyl can finally accept his teacher's death, and can finally weep for him.

On Earth, Adam Strange, unshaven and with a broken arm, arrives at Abby's door and delivers the message that Swamp Thing is alive and will be returning as soon as he can. But when he blandly states that he talked with him on the planet Rann which he visits frequently, Abby dismisses him as a lunatic and her grief for Alec once more comes to the surface as bitter disappointment.

* * * * *

Beginning with the end, yes, one can see how Adam's story would sound like the ravings of a lunatic. But on the other hand, Adam Strange has had contact in the past with the Justice League. He would conceivably know how to contact them again in order to see to it that his message was delivered to Abby and believed.

Dealing with the main body of the story, this one issue has as much depth and texture as you'd expect to find in a novel. We're introduced to a number of characters, including a happy couple who are living together and contemplating marriage, as well as an artist and a priest who has lost his faith. When they are fused into the body of the Swamp Thing, their thoughts are exposed to each other plus they each experience the solitude of their own souls. In the case of the artist, she had wanted to be alone. When she is she finds that her soul is a barren place. Following their experience in the Swamp Thing's body, all of these characters are changed by the experience. The happy couple sees inside each other as well as how each perceives the other, and in the end their love is gone. The priest who has been contemplating suicide has his spirit renewed while the artist feels so lonely that now she is contemplating suicide. And yet these are all just sidelights of the plot, little subplots added to give the story texture and the plant people personality. Too often in comic books a character visits a science fiction world and remarks in passing that these are intelligent plants, but what that really means is never explored. What is a day in the life of an intelligent plant like? Do they have art? Religion? Moore answers these questions as a way of showing the impact of an alien being on their society.

Medphyl as a Green Lantern who is losing his faith in himself is more than just the cliche it just seems because there is a reason. He isn't bored or uncertain about his life, he's in grief over the death of his mentor, Jothra, and is inconsolable. The scenes with Medphyl walking with Jothra are quite poignant as it calls to mind our own emotions and how we would feel if we'd had the chance to talk once more with someone who had been suddenly taken from us. That the intellect that powers the body is not Jothra's isn't the point — it's just seeing and speaking with the physical presence that allows the grieving process to run its course, not unlike seeing the body for the last time at a funeral. The line, "And, in the Lizard Gardens, Great Medphyl weeps, and the weeping is good," is very touching and moving in its simplicity because of how much it conveys. It says a lot by only saying just enough. We add the rest ourselves.

The art by Veitch and Alcala cannot be praised enough. As brilliant as Moore's script it, without the right artists to capture those words and translate them into images, the words would only stand by themselves and be unconnected, which is sadly the way I felt about "loving the Alien" in issue #60. In fact "All Flesh Is Grass" points out just how important the images are to translating the author's thoughts and bringing them fully to life. The double-page spread on pages 6 & 7 need no words to describe what we're seeing. We can feel what is happening in that scene. We can't feel anything that we saw in "loving the Alien."

So far in Swampy's space saga, Alan Moore has managed to incorporate Adam Strange, the Hawk police of Thanagar and now a Green Lantern. His interpretations of each have been different from anyone else who has tried their hand at them before. His Green Lantern, Medphyl, is I think his best attempt among those characters as he brought life and dimension to a character who has a cyclops eye and green foliage for hair. Not an easy thing to do.

SWAMP THING #62 — "Wavelength"

Writer: Rick Veitch
Penciler: Rick Veitch
Inker: Alfredo Alcala
Colorist: Tatjana Wood
Editor: Karen Berger

Metron, one of the New Gods, sits in his Mobius Chair out in space, on the edge of the last known universe, the Promethian Galaxy which is on the edge of The Source wherein lie the secrets of the universe.

Nearby are are two huge beings who look like statues. They had enlarged their atomic structure eons ago while trying to find a way to penetrate The Source. Now they exist at a rate of life so slow it takes a million years for their hearts to beat once.

Metron finds a gigantic Mother Box floating nearby and he reduces it back to its normal size. But in so doing this exhausts the X-Element which powers his Mobius Chair, stranding him there.

Shortly thereafter the Swamp Thing arrives, animating some plant life that Metron had picked up in his chair. Swampy converses with Metron and he explains that he believes that he can take Metron into the source using the Mother Box as well as his new found ability to alter his own wavelength.

They enter The Source and find many things, such as countless incidents which are happening simultaneously in time and space, including the origin of The Swamp Thing and his life with Abby. This in itself almost drives Swamp Thing mad until Mother Box takes this memory away from him and he continues on his journey through space to Earth, after taking Metron to Apokalypse where he tells all he's learned to Darkseid in hopes of trading the information for another X-Element to power the Mobius Chair.

Darkseid points out that Metron never actually entered The Source at all, but was tricked by an Aleph, a point from which one can observe all other points in time and space. But he is intrigued at the information which could have driven a being as powerful as The Swamp Thing crazy, and this he reads from where it is stored in the Mother Box. In return he gives Metron the X-Element he needs as he has found something else he had left out of the anti-life equation that he was not capable of anticipating -- love.

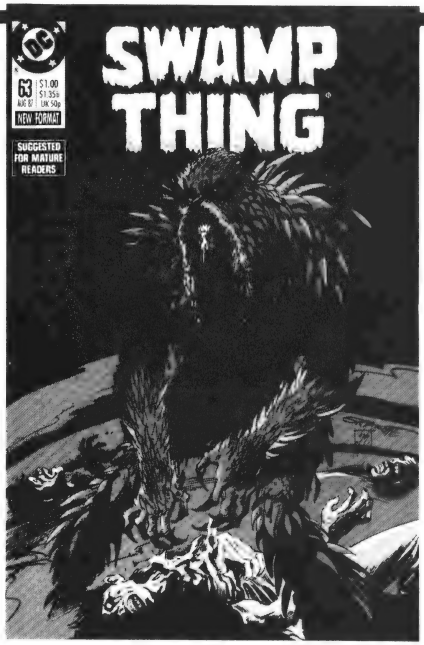
* * * * *

This story is well written and thoughtful but ultimately, well, hollow. It starts off promisingly enough with its description of the huge statues that were once living beings: "They were lovers, sire. . . Lovers in the place of giants. I visited them often in their bridal suite, and was witness to the spectacle of their frozen passion." This reads very much like prose of Alan Moore and the way it often bristles with erotic metaphors.

But then the story bogs down in an exploration of "The Source" which turns out not the be what it seems after all so that all it ends up being is yet another New Gods story which ends with Darkseid making some self-satisfying observation. That's the ultimate flaw of this. It isn't really a Swamp Thing story at all. While this could be said of the first of the two-part Adam Strange story of a few issues back, at least the two tied into each other and the tale remained interesting all the way through. But I have just never found The New Gods to be interesting. They are just so far removed from anything identifiably human, like the gods of Asgard in Thor, that I have just never found their comings and goings to be anything but boring as they are ultimately concerned about things that only affect them and that have never impacted on anyone even remotely human. The make affectations at being human on some level, but the connection never really happens. If anything, "Wavelength" serves only to capture everything that is wrong with most any New Gods story as it is ultimately souless and devoid of passion of any sort. Even Darkseid, who is supposed to be the epitomy of evil, does not project evil. He's bad because the captions and the dialogue say so, but nothing that he does says so. There is nothing frightening about him that reaches out and grips us with any sort of force. His actions tend to be the stock actions of comic book villains but he does nothing that communicates that he understands, revels in or enjoys evil. Sleez, a being Darkseid banished from his realm decades ago, and who was recently created and introduced by John Byrne in an issue of Action Comics captures the sense of true, recognizable evil better than anything we have ever seen come out of Darkseid. Sleez bothers me like Darkseid never has. I believe in Sleez. I don't believe in Darkseid as he never does anything that seems even remotely real on any level, not unlike this well written but empty plot called "Wavelength."

SWAMP THING #63 — "Loose Ends (Reprise)"

Writer: Alan Moore
Artists: Rick Veitch and Alfredo Alcala
Colorist: Tatjana Wood
Editor: Karen Berger



Swamp Thing returns to Earth at last, but he has a few loose ends to tie up before he feels that he can return to Abby safely.

Abby, meanwhile, goes to the hospital where her ex-husband, Matt, still lies in a coma just as he has for two years. She's feeling pretty low as neither of her marriages has exactly worked out well.

Chester Williams shows up at Abby's house when she's out and makes friends with Liz Tremayne, doing a lot for her self-esteem in the process.

Swamp Thing seeks out and finds his first victim, the man who fired the rocket launcher at him in Gotham. His name is Foley and he's with a whore. The bouquet of roses he's brought with him suddenly expands and engulfs him until he's just a bloddy mess.

At the hospital, Chester Williams shows up looking for Abby and finds the man he gave one of Swampy's tubers to for the man's cancer stricken wife. The man's wife dies just before he arrives, but she had taken a bite from the tuber and died happy.

The napalm specialist on the Gotham job, Paulie Skinner, is visiting his parents home and is asleep with the window open. He's found suffocated when his room fills with hundreds of pounds of peach blossoms.

Cutley, another of those involved in the Gotham hit on Swamp Thing, is alone at his country retreat, pondering the report of a break in at D.D.I. of some of their files and a trace of moss left behind. He goes out on his lawn and suddenly finds that it has grown up around him into a huge maze walled by thorns. His wife had been trying to phone him. She'd had a terribly dream that he was going to become lost.

At D.D.I., Wicker is showing nervous fear. He's had all the plants removed from the area. Wicker knows what's happened to Foley and Skinner and what it must mean. He's back. Wicker, the brains behind what was done to the Swamp Thing, the mastermind of the plot, suddenly realizes that the sandwich he's eating has a tomatoe in it. But his realization comes too late. Suddenly plants start erupting out of his body with furious growth until his entire body has been transformed into a tree in the middle of his office.

Abby and Chester are out walking at the edge of the swamp when Chester starts finding tubers which he recognizes as Swampy's. He's trying to figure out how to tell Abby what he's thinking when the trees spontaneously burst into bloom and Swampy bursts out of the ground, sweeping Abby up in his arms.

* * * * * *

This issue opens with a scene of two lovers and closes on one as well. When Swampy arrives on Earth his electroskeleton passes through a glade where a young woman is about to have her first sexual experience but she's startled when the plants around her suddenly burst into bloom! This is followed by a fascinating visual of the Swamp Thing passing through the Earth's crust, past the buried bones of a Tyrannosaurus Rex.

The scenes of Abby at the hospital visiting her comatose first husband, Matt, are quite poignant as it shows the depth of her feelings of loss. Matt is all she has left of her marriages and "His body's the grave of his mind, rooted there, translucent stalks rise from vein and nostril into glass flowers. Containing glucose to lure bees." Even her thoughts are trapped in botanical metaphors. Who else would describe such a grim, sterile hospital setting in such a way?

We see Liz Tremayne, the woman terrorized by her dead husband's paranoia, slowing recovering, this time with the help of Chester Williams, the ex-hippie holdover from the Sixties. Both suffer from their own individual forms of societal alientation but deal with it in different ways. Chester good naturedly accepts his while Liz must put her more fearsome version behind her in order to move on with her life and regain her lost individuality.

Swamp Thing becomes a hitman this issue when he breaks into D.D.I. and finds his own file to learn who was behind his assassination in Gotham. His methods of disposing of the team of assassins are both unique and unpleasant, particularly Foley and Wicker. But this all begs the question, if Swampy will go after the napalm expert, a man hired for the job, why didn't he go after Lex Luthor, the one responsible for him being trapped in his burning body so that he had to project himself off the Earth due to the scrambling of his biomatrix? Luthor is conspicuous by his absence. The new version of Lex Luthor is rather boring anyway. Off him and let Superman deal with more interesting characters. Swampy won't, of course, because he's a major character in the DC canon while the others were either concocted for that story or else had only been kicking around in the Swamp Thing series, and were thus expendible.

Wicker in particular got what he deserved, although I wish that Veitch and Alcala had been able to capture the vileness of the character that John Totleben did in the issue when Swampy was "killed." Totleben showed us a Wicker who was a slimey killer possessed of great political power, and who enjoyed flexing his bureaucratic muscles. If it wasn't for the scar, I wouldn't have even recognized this version of the character as Wicker at all. This Wicker seems weak, like a cornered rat, so his destruction doesn't form as abrupt a contrast to the dynamic, dangerous individual we'd seen before.

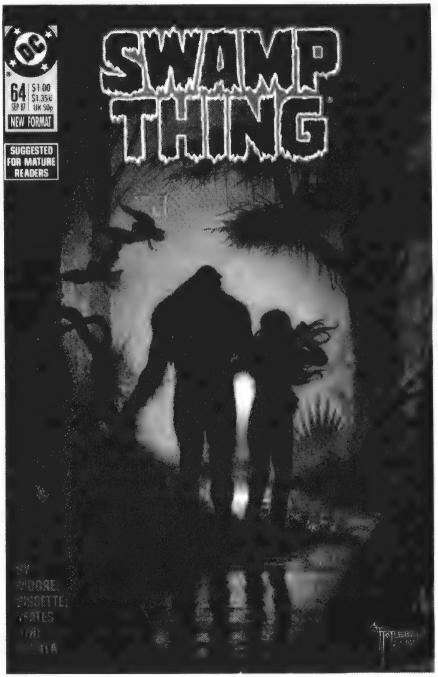
The ending is a voiceless reunion that nonetheless says it all. After all the pain Abby has endured, words could not possibly do justice to her feelings at that moment.

Feelings are what many of Moore's Swamp Thing tales have been about, and in particular human relationships and the twisted forms they sometimes take. Abby was persecuted for her relationship with Swampy by people whose own interpersonal relationships were no doubt often far less satisfying and mutually nurturing as what Alex and Abby experience. While still trying to recover from her own loss, Abby was plunged pell-mell into the hell of someone else's twisted relationship when Liz Tremayne's insane husband came after her, only to end up as brunch for the alligators. But then no doubt many people feel as though they're being torn apart by alligators when their relationships end.

Time and again Moore captures the depths of what it is to be a human being and does not feel selfconscious about putting these truths into a comic book story for people to perhaps uncomfortably identify with. Rarely has characterization of this type even been attempted in comics, much less carried out on such a long term basis as Moore did on his classic tenre on Swamp Thing. These issues are a textbook for comic book writers on what can and should be done in the form to elevate it above the plane of children's literature it has safely occupied since the 1930s. Moore has shown that its time for comics to stop being safe and start being well written.

SWAMP THING #64 — "Return Of The Good Gumbo"

Writer: Alan Moore
Artists: Steve Bissette, Tom Yeates, Rick Veitch and Alfredo Alcala
Colorist: Tatjana Wood
Editor: Karen Berger



In the Louisiana Bayou, a Cajun named La Bostrie poles his boat through the swamp, observing subtle differences and wondering how much longer they'll be able to live their unspoiled lifestyle.

Swamp Thing and Abby just revel in each other's presence while he briefly tells her of his adventures on other worlds. He hesitates to reveal the way he saved Rann from famine because he could do the same for Earth, and wonders if he should. Finally he decides to that heal the wounds of our world's biosphere would just give the polluters, miners and loggers the excuse they need to continue with their rape of the land, knowing that the Swamp Thing will always be around to heal their scars from the land.

He explores the swamp with Abby, at one point reforming his body into a boat and another time riding an alligator as though it's a horse. Finally he gives Abby one of his tubers and she bites from it, cauing them to have an erotic union of their spirits.

Later he goes to where there's a small island in the swamp and has the vegetation reform into a "house" for them, where they decide to retire for awhile.

Chester supports them in their decision and agrees to take care of Liz Tremayne. She comes and says goodbye to Alec, remembering that she once wrote a book about him. Alec tells her that perhaps she'll write another one some day. Alec and Abby go off into the swamp, the two loves once separated by galaxies are at last united as they should have been.

The photographer who started all of the recent trouble by snapping the pictures of Abby with the Swamp Thing has heard that it is back and is trying to buy a ride into the swamp from the Cajun, Gene LaBostrie. The Cajun acts as though he doesn't understand English and leaves the photographer with his promises of money far behind. In the swamp, the Cajun has noted that something he'd felt was missing earlier has returned. A certain vitality both in the air and in the plants. Even their food tastes better.

Deep in the swamp, Alec and Abby are happy together, more secure than they have ever been.

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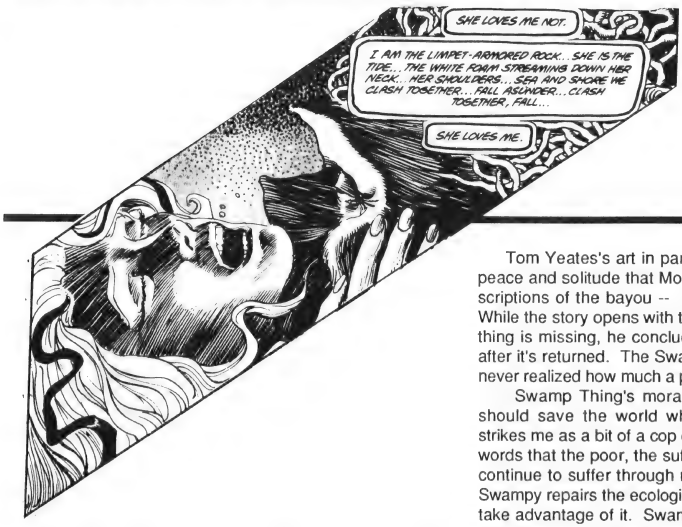
SHE LOVES ME NOT.
I AM THE LIMPET-ARMORED ROCK... SHE IS THE TIDE... THE WHITE FOAM STREAMING DOWN HER NECK... HER SHOULDERS... SEA AND SHORE WE CLASH TOGETHER... FALL ASUNDER... CLASH TOGETHER, FALL...
SHE LOVES ME.

Although the art credits don't break down who drew and inked what, it's obvious that Tom Yeates penciled and inked pages 1-3 and 20-24, like bookends on the story. Although it seems clear that Stephen Bissette drew pages 14-19, his pencilling may be elsewhere in the issue as well. Still, the art does form a seamless whole. Yeates contribution in particular makes one wish he'd make further contributions to the series. Some fans may have already forgotten that he was the original artist when Saga Of The Swamp Thing was the new title of this revived series. The influence of Al Williamson on Tom's work is particularly evident on the bottom half of page one.

For Alan Moore, this story is the calm after the storm. Swamp Thing has exacted his revenge on those who hurt him. But what about that photographer glimpsed at the end of the story? Isn't he as much to blame as the naplam expert Swampy killed? Just because the guy isn't some well paid hitman who also sells his services to the Contras doesn't mean he's any less guilty. Because he looks like a nerd doesn't make him any less dangerous. And if he's got the kind of money to throw around that he offered the Cajun, he'll buy his way into the swamp again to take more pictures. A person like that isn't going to walk away from a followup to the biggest story of his career.

Tom Yeates's art in particular catches the sense of peace and solitude that Moore tries to convey in his descriptions of the bayou -- bright, green and peaceful. While the story opens with the Cajun noticing that something is missing, he concludes understanding what it is after it's returned. The Swamp Thing. Until then they'd never realized how much a part of their lives he was.

Swamp Thing's moral dilemma over whether he should save the world where it suffers from famine strikes me as a bit of a cop out. He is saying in so many words that the poor, the suffering and the starving must continue to suffer through misery and death because if Swampy repairs the ecological damage the profiteers will take advantage of it. Swampy's ethical position doesn't stop the land profiteers at all, it just reduces what they have to rape, but it does harm those innocents who are the victims of the actions of the profiteers as well as of their own governments impotence and political maneuverings. Swampy actually draws a parallel between himself and a god when he thinks: "Is this, then, what it is to be a god? To know and never do? To watch the world wind by. . . and in its windings find content. . . ?" But Swampy isn't a god. He has the power to do good and has talked himself out of it with some logic that even he realizes wouldn't stand up to the test of argument because he refuses to reveal to Abby what he did on Rann.

But it remains a fine farewell issue that Moore delivers as he departs the series as it's atmosphere is the gentle sorrow one experiences when leaving old friends who will be gone we know not how long. The story forms a natural finish to this latest cycle in the history of the Swamp Thing, and I'm afraid that all the stories that follow will be forever measured against this, just the way that after Len Wein and Berni Wrightson left Swamp Thing all other stories were measured against that bunch of issues and found wanting until Alan Moore came along to pump life and flowery descriptions into a series which began as a saga of a thing on search of its lost humanity. Under the skillful manipulation of Alan Moore, Swamp Thing at last found his humanity, and more.

FOLLOWING IN THE SQUISHY FOOTSTEPS OF ALAN MOORE

Not since Frank Miller was the writer on Daredevil (both times) has a writer captured and character and reinterpreted him with such relentless individuality as Alan Moore did with Swamp Thing. He began by exploring just what Swampy really is and concluded that he's not the transformed and disfigured remains of Alec Holland at all but rather a vegetable copy of the basic physical entity based on the charred body that was swallowed up by the swamp. The cells remembered that they had once been Alec Holland, but as established by later stories, the soul of the real Alec Holland is safely esconced in the afterlife with his beloved wife. Swamp Thing is actually an elemental and Moore gradually developed a background for this, culminating in the introduction of the Parliament of Trees, the gathering place in the heart of earth's "green" where the former elementals charged with the protection of the "green" from mankind have gathered.

All of this cluminated in issue 64, Alan Moore's forty-fourth issue of Swamp Thing (including Annual #2 and excluding fill-ins written by Bissette and Veitch). Swampy was back on earth with Abby and all was right with the world.

So what happens next? Too often when a new writer comes on a book which has become as individual as Swamp Thing has, the scripter is overwhelmed at attempting to continue the style and intent of what has gone before, and so he doesn't even try. This happened after Frank Miller's first stint on Daredevil when a couple issues attempted to follow Miller's appraoch but the writers seemed to surrender to what was apparently too much work. Writing superhero comics seems to be easy unless you want to write good superhero comics -- What? Write quality on a deadline? This is why work by Miller and Moore stands out like it does. It's unexpected.

For these and similar reasons, I wasn't expecting Swamp Thing to be very interesting to read in the wake of Moore's departure. I even let the issues pile up unread for a few months. The only one I had read, Annual #3, struck me as a good idea not well executed, with a crazy-quilt of artists whose styles didn't even look similar from one page to the next and a long, boring story about DC's stable of gorilla "stars" dominated by the supermind of Gorilla Grodd on their way to rescue him from his prison in Gorilla City in Africa. Now I'm a fan of the Sixties Flash comic and I liked the strange series of Grodd stories which appeared back then, but not even nostalgia could overcome the ennui this story engendered in me. The bland art and the tired, Seventies-style story (Can you remember any Seventies DC story which isn't a Denny O'Neil Batman or Green Lantern story, or the Wein/Wrightson Swamp Thing?) confirmed all my worst fears for the series.

But then I read the other issues. Rick Veitch, the artist of most of the issues after #50, has carefully studdied Moore's approach to the character and tried to capture that sensibility in his issues, which he both writes and draws. With the exception of the third annual, Veitch is turning in surprisingly good work, cleaving closer to the bone of Moore's style and intent that I would have though possible.

In issue #65, "(We Could Be) Diving For Pearls," Swampy returns to the Parliament of Trees for the first time since his return to earth. They are shocked at his presence as they had believed him destroyed when his presence was no longer felt on the planet. No elemental has ever before left the world he was attuned to and returned. In his absence the Parliament had created a new elemental that was even then awaiting the right moment for its birth into the biosphere. When they recover from their shock at the Swamp Thing's return, they tell

him to kill the unborn elemental -- by eating it. He refuses, believing there has been enough killing. But Swamp Thing also makes a telling observation, something which sets him apart from the Parliament of Trees, which he was formerly in awe of, as well as apart from any other elemental. "I'm one of you. . . but I am also. . . different. I have braved the empty void. . . and tasted. . . life forms beyond. . . even your dreams. I am no longer. . . just of the earth. I am a creature. . . of the universe now."

Thus Veitch is following the threads of logic laid down by Moore continuing on in new directions not formerly explored by the title. And by sparing the unborn elemental a new plotline is also growing.

Abby embarks on a first of her own by taking a bite of one of Swampy's tubers in his absence. At first she starts having nightmare visions, including one of Arcane and another of her comatose husband attempting to pull her underwater. When she encounters Constantine she believs that he's a hallucination as well, until he hands her a carry-out bag from the Houma diner with the breakfast in it she was wishing for earlier.

Veitch continues the characterization of Constantine established by Moore in that the man is portrayed as being both inscrutible and mysterious not unlike The Phantom Stranger. But in his own series, Hellblazer, we see a very different sort of Constantine, a man who is an expert in the field of the supernatural but is nevertheless very human. This facade of jovial arrogance with which he's portrayed in the pages of Swamp Thing is all but absent. One might almost think they were two different characters. But this time when Constantine tells Swampy he has a mission for him, Swamp Thing basically tells him to stuff it -- that he's through with all that. He even threatens Constantine with death and makes it clear that he's through being the savior of the earth and tells him to watch out for the new elemental that's on its way.

But in putting Constantine in his place, Swampy refers to him as being "merely human," a crack that Abby chooses to take personally.

The third annual opens with Abby bickering with Alec over this. Bickering? She's downright nasty. None of this rings true because Abby and Alec have shared their minds and essence on the most basic level and so she knows exactly what he thinks of her and would not feel this touchy about it. She also knows what Swampy thinks of Constantine and would have taken his "merely human" remark as a joke and something aimed at Constantine in particular. She wouldn't have acted like a weepy teenager who easily takes offense. Abby went through the ringer when she was arrested and jailed for having an "unnatural" relationship with Swampy. She stood up to this with quiet dignity and grace. If she had anything to get angry about, that would have been it. But the worst comes when she starts this insane ramble about Arcane, her father and Alec and all of the "monsters" in her life. Abby would never call Alec a monster! This whole scene is unthinkable. It seems that whenever a writer is faced with writing a female character, one of the first things he does is make her bitchy. It's the easy way, but the way that Alan Moore chose not to pursue, perhaps because it's a cliche.

The rest of the issue has its moments, such as when a black priest in Africa meets Bwana Beast, an ancient legend that his people have revered since time immemorial, and is disturbed to discover that their god is white. This is a great bit and is a sly poke at all of the Tarzan-like characters in fiction who manage to rise to the top of the ladder in a jangle land which they're not native to seemingly largely because they're white.

There is also an odd subplot in which Swampy relives

his origin psychologically, but then comes back to itself, but none of it has anything to do with the main plot. The Gorilla Grodd using the various DC ape characters to free himself is not tied to the Swamp Thing saga by any scene! While a strange vegetable-ape thing appears in the story, no one knows ehere he came from or what his origin is. While it appears at the time that Swampy is in a coma in the swamp, we can assume that somehow Grodd's mindforce affected Swamp Thing and caused this ape-like manifestation of him, but it's never explicitly clear that this is so. All in all it makes one wonder what a Gorilla Grodd story is doing in a Swamp Thing annual. The best part of the issue is the terrific cover by Brian Bolland.

While Swampy and Abby seemed to have made up at the conclusion of the annual, here in #66 she's crying again. Finally Swampy decides to show Abby how different someone can be for the experiences he has had. He uses his biomatrix to alter Abby's so that she can astral project. Finally she learns what it's like for him when he does this and in the process she goes to heaven and encounters the real Alec Holland and his wife Linda. Holland shows her Hell in the distance and we see the dispensation of the hitmen that Swampy assassinated in issue #63. Instead of burning in Hell they're buried up to their noses in vermin. During this sequence we're unsure if this is really Alec Holland or whether it could be Arcane trying to set her up for something because it's played very straight but until it's over we wonder whether all is as it appears to be.

Holland actually starts coming on to Abby until she comes to her senses and returns to her own body, which is being temporarily inhabited by Swampy to watch over it until her return. Back again, she understands Alec now and apologizes for being so "human."

There's a good subplot with Constantine visiting the Jason Woodrue in the Arkham Asylum and learning that something is happening with Solomon Grundy. Constantine is captured and taken prisoner by a scientist at the asylum, an old classmate of Constantines who always hated him. In the end John Constantine pulls one of his mysterious disappearances, such as he did when he showed Swampy how to "baffle a vegetable."

While the inking on #66 is credited to Alfredo Alcala, , pages 18-20 are clearly inked by someone else who does a generally terrible job. Some of it looks as though Alcala may have touched it up here and there but most of it is just bland, forgettable work, particularly when we se such nice inking on page 17 and then turn the page and see the dull linework on 18 and 19. It looks as though one of the artists let a friend ink the pages as a favor with less than creditable results.

Issue #67 opens with a sequence in a video store. When Constantine escaped from the asylum, he took the videotape with him which had monitored his visit to the cell of Jason Woodrue. He has the clerk in a video store play it on a VCR for him, and when the guy asks what the hell it is, Constantine replies, "Remember a monster movie that bombed out a few years back, I think the title was Swamp Thing, or something like that...?" And when the guy guesses that this is the sequel, Constantine replies, "Just what the world needs, eh? Another grotty dim-witted clod of a film to add to the cultural wasteland." This is the first time that the comic has made a pointed, opinionated reference to the Swamp Thing movie, much less making fun of it. After all, Swamp Thing Annual #1 is the comic book adaptation of the movie. And even though Siskel and Ebert like the movie, not a lot of other people did.

The video store sequence is a treat because most of the film titles displayed are real, including Spider Baby and Ilsa, She-Wolf of the S.S. A couple others look like

inking errors, such as Let Them Die Slow instead of the actual Let Them Die Slowly and the inexplicable Zabid instead of Rabid.

Solomon Grundy, formerly of Earth II, is one of the survivors of the Crisis On Infinite Earths and here is shown as harboring an unwelcome guest inside his own body -- the elemental. Grundy's skin is usually pure white, but right now it's green. Grundy was DC's version of the incredible Hulk back in the Forties and his appearance and dialogue bear more than just a passing resemblance to the Marvel character. But while the elemental is inside Grundy, it cannot control his mind completely and periodically the real Grundy bursts out with maniacal force. He even has a knock down drag out fight with the Swamp Thing, the first such fist-fight in the title in quite some time. And when Swampy tries to evacuate the smashed body, he finds himself trapped again. It takes Constantine to reveal to him why -- the Parliament of Trees have decided they want Swampy to join with them so that they can learn what he learned out in space.

A running gag in the Parliament of Trees is apparent again this issue when on page ten we can clearly see that one of them is the spitting image of the Man-Thing, a creature similar to Swampy whose origin appeared just a few months before the original Swamp Thing #1 did in the early Seventies.

Solomon Grundy has been hanging out near a paper mill in Slaughter Swamp. Or it used to be a swamp. The forest is all but gone due to the vile practice of clear-cutting (cutting down every tree in sight instead of passing the small ones and replanting for the future). Swampy gives one of the logger a good scare when he appears in the bark of a tree just as a logger is about the saw itm down.

These post-Moore issues are providing just as many surprises and pleasant moments as many of the actual Alan Moore issues did. They don't have quite the emotional depth and sheer creative radiance that Moore achieved at his best, but they are still much better than average comics.

Issue #68 follows the lives of the supporting characters, such as Abby and Chester, while Swampy consults with the Parliament of trees. Some of the trees are portrayed in a beautiful double-page image on pages 4 and 5, which has fabulous art by Veitch and Alcala. Alcala has produced often overlooked but fabulous work in comics for years, but he just managed to keep doing it for lesser titles, only occasionally being glimpsed in Savage Sword of Conan or in a fan favorite such as his current and aesthetically rewarding work on Swamp Thing.

This issue has a lot going for it, including the image on page 9 of the first Swamp Thing. Remember that old House of Secrets story by Wein & Wrightson which features a Swamp Monster which we could never connect up to what followed in the Swamp Thing series? Well, besides being the inspiration for that series, Veitch here establishes it as the Swamp Thing which pre-dated Alec, and it all dovetails perfectly.

Besides the communion with the Parliament of Trees, we meet the person who seems like he'll become the body transformed in death to be the new earth elemental. The only problem is that he's a psycho-killer who was blown up by his own superiors when he failed to carry out a suicide car-bomb attack. Strange things are coming down and Veitch shows no sign of tiring in his steady effort to present worthy, powerful and imaginative stories. Swamp Thing is still very good. The tales are imaginative and are not your typical comic book fare. The legacy left by Moore is alive and well and the team of Rick Veitch and Alfredo Alcala are striving to their utmost to keep the vitality at a high level. What a pleasant and more than welcome surprise.

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